

A photograph of Professor of English Dan Ritchie, an older man with light-colored hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a purple patterned tie. He is smiling and looking down at a stack of old newspapers in a wicker basket. The newspapers are yellowed with age and some have the word "Harlan" visible. The background shows a bookshelf filled with books and a window with blue blinds.

Professor of English Dan Ritchie retires after 36 years. He has learned to trust his place in God's plan throughout his entire career.

Dr. Ritchie shares newspapers from when he was a Kentucky journalist before he came to Minnesota. | Photo by Hannah Hobus

A change in the tide

By Soraya Keiser

English Professor Dan Ritchie sits with his wife Judie and watches the sun set from the rocky beach of Lindisfarne, a monastic community off the northeast coast of England. As the sun dips into the water and turns the sky pink, the tide comes in and makes the small strip of land an island. Twice a day to the pull of the moon, Lindisfarne becomes a quiet destination once again. No one can leave across the causeway until the morning. Ritchie wants the students he has taken here on Bethel's England Term study abroad trip to know that, while on this island, the rhythms they live by are not their own.

“There’s nothing to do except reflect on your own walk with God ... and see your place in God’s plan,” Ritchie said.

God’s plan has led Ritchie from being a piano-playing 14-year-old with a paper route from Louisville, Kentucky to a professor with more than 36 years of teaching experience and a wall full of memories from his times climbing Mt. Snowdon in Wales to attending a Humanities program dance at the James J. Hill house in St. Paul.

Lindisfarne, a holy island rich in history, religion and politics, continues to stand out among all of Ritchie’s other memories. He loves how these seemingly different topics can be unified into a place, book or topic.

Originally a professor of Christianity in Western Culture for seven years, Ritchie loved the concept of team teaching and exploring the

Dr. Ritchie points out photos as well as articles that he worked on at the newspaper. | Photo by Hannah Hobus





Dr. Ritchie and his wife Judie chat in their living room while enjoying a cup of tea and reminiscing on their past study abroad trips. | Photo by Hannah Hobus

connection between history and theology with students. However, he thought that combining more of the first-year general education classes and giving students time to read full historical texts would, in the end, be more beneficial.

“When you have snippets from books, they’re inevitably curated for the professor’s purposes, and that’s fine in certain circumstances,” Ritchie said. “However, what’s great about great books is that they’re always saying different things to different people and different things in different time periods.”

This is how the concept of the Bethel Humanities program came to be. After a curriculum review in 2000, the Humanities program started in 2002 and Ritchie left CWC for good. 19 years later, Ritchie is finishing up teaching his last round of Humanities courses before his retirement in December. His legacy through the program will continue to teach students the connections between history, theology, art and literature even as he moves on.

“We want to empower students to see on their own the value of

great works of writing,” Ritchie said.

Those great works of writing have always been at the center of Ritchie’s work, whether it be when he’s teaching “Paradise Lost” in an English class, brushing up on his Karl Marx knowledge for Humanities IV or even working as a journalist in Kentucky covering city council meetings and coal strikes.

One of his favorite things to do is teach great works of literature in the very places they were written or based. As the faculty leader on four separate England Terms, Ritchie has taught Shakespeare in London, Jane Austen in Lyme Regis and Romantic poetry in the Lake District.

“The keynote of the trip is literature on location,” said Ritchie. “We are always traveling to locations where the literature either was written or took place.”

Leading these trips has been such a joy for Ritchie and Judie that in retirement they hope to lead similar trips for adults centered around the idea of pilgrimage.

“We’re not interested in just luxury experiences,” Ritchie said. “The kinds of people that



In the living room, Dr. Ritchie has his piano where he plays regularly. | Photo by Hannah Hobus



Ritchie's daughter, Hilary, remembers childhood trips with her family through Europe. | Photo by Hannah Hobus

we can relate to the most are the kinds of people that are looking for meaning in their lives and meaning in their travel.”

That means places like Lindisfarne or the Taizé community in central France will definitely be on the list.

Hilary, the youngest of Judie and Ritchie's three children, remembers the Taizé community from her time accompanying her parents on England Term, even though she was only eight years old.

The Taizé Community is a Christian monastery composed of brothers from both Catholic and Protestant traditions. They are known for their simple, meditative form of worship that includes mantra songs, prayerful silence and short readings in a candle-lit environment. Now the United Worship Coordinator at Bethel, Hilary's time spent in the Taizé community stands out to her the most.

“They had worship every day and they just would sing these very repetitive songs from scripture that I think helped me in what I'm doing now,” Hilary said. “Just to see that worship isn't just what we do in my church, that there's lots of different ways that people express worship.”

All the places that Ritchie and his family have traveled to remain

not just in memory alone. Judie says their kids have described their home as an art museum, and it's true. Art fills the walls and almost every knick-knack has a meaning. There's the nativity scene painted on papyrus from Egypt displayed in the dining room. A ceramic bowl decorated with tulips from their daughter-in-law's family in Turkey hangs on the wall in the living room. The couch cushions are decorated with a tapestry from Normandy.

Ritchie is not only intentional in his material possessions. According to Department of English and Journalism colleague Dr. Marion Larson, Ritchie has single-handedly been the keeper of the departmental faculty birthday calendar. He buys the card, passes it around the department and ensures that the person receives it on time.

He would ask off of work to chaperone his children's field trips because he wanted to foster in them a love for learning.

Every morning he reads news sources from both sides of the political spectrum just so he remains well informed from all perspectives. The New York Times. The National Review. NPR.

He listens to an audiobook every morning on his ride to work. Right now, it's a biography on former president Lyndon B. Johnson, who Ritchie remembers from when he was a kid.

With his times leading England Term in the past and his educational career soon to be as well, Ritchie is stepping into an entirely unknown time of life.

“When you're in the middle of a job, you have a schedule. You know what your life is going to look like,” Ritchie said. “And it's hard when you retire or are facing retirement to figure out what your days are going to be.”

Ritchie has been comforted by Psalm 139 when thinking about the future. Part of the psalm reads, “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

“That verse, the assurance that God has numbered my days, that he knows in his book what's going to be written, that was a helpful thing to reflect on,” Ritchie said.

Whether on the shores of Lindisfarne or while enjoying an early morning cup of coffee with one of Judie's cran-raspberry scones, Ritchie will continue to take comfort with his role in God's plan. **C**

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